

Increase Return on Your Marketing Investment: It's not what you spend—it's how you spend it

**North Dakota Nature & Rural Tourism Conference
Fargo Dome, Fargo, North Dakota
January 16, 2007**

No one ever has enough money to take advantage of every marketing opportunity that presents itself.

More importantly, you wouldn't want to, even if you could.

Target audiences

- How do you identify your target audience(s)?
 - Identify the primary focus of your business (example: fishing)
 - Identify who the focus appeals to (fishermen/women)
 - Narrow down to specific groups (bass fishing)
- Why?
- You can't offer/provide everything—it's not realistic.
- Promote what you do offer (excellent bass fishing)
- Multiple focuses? Multiple target audiences with potential overlaps.
 - Example: Hunting and fishing
 - Audiences: Hunters, fishing enthusiasts, and the overlap audience: people who do both

Demographics

- Simply put, demographics are what makes your target audiences tick—for instance:
 - Age
 - Gender
 - Education
 - Income
 - Occupation
 - Geographic location

- Also look at categories that apply to your business, possibly:
 - Length of stay
 - Frequency
 - Type(s) of services)
 - Average expenditure

*** Worth Noting re: Target Audiences & Demographics**

- Your decisions don't have to be based on:
 - Formal research
 - Statistics gathered by national groups or associations
- Valid informal research includes:
 - Tally research (i.e., ask each phone caller, “How did you hear about us?” and keep track)
 - Tracking guest/customer addresses from registration slips, checks, charge processing info (also a great source for building a data base)
 - Friendly conversation with guests (especially if you're memory's good)

Words & images

- They don't mean the same things to all people (beach exercise)
 - Hawaii, Mexico (Pacific or Gulf coast?), Florida, Caribbean, Jamaica, Australia, lake beach?
 - How do these locations make the experience differ?
- A different type of example: (“rustic” exercise—put yourself in the mindset of potential guests unfamiliar with the Great Plains)
 - Quaint, quilt on the bed, gingham curtains, braided rugs?
 - Or “just-this-side-of-ghost-town-what-have-I-gotten-myself-into?”
 - Anything in between
- A picture paints 1,000 words, and will demonstrate exactly what your guests/customers can expect

Perceptions & Expectations

- Be careful of—
 - What you say
 - How you say it
- Perceptions:
 - They are your audience's reality—even when they're not real
 - Once your audience has created a perception, it's almost impossible to correct
- Expectations:
 - Maintain the fine line between promising what you CAN provide, and over-promising
 - Deliver what you've promised—your credibility depends on it
 -

Strategies

1) Branding

- Branding creates a perceived increase in value to the customer.
- It has evolved to be equivalent with an idea, word, phrase or tag line that is used so consistently in promoting and positioning that it becomes synonymous with the product or service.
- Examples include:
 - "You're in good hands with [Allstate]."
 - "Don't leave home without it" [American Express]
 - "Have it your way" [Burger King]
 - "It keeps going, and going, and going..." [Energizer Batteries]
 - "Finger-lickin' good." [Kentucky Fried Chicken]
 - "Betcha can't eat just one." [Lay's Potato Chips]
 - "The milk chocolate melts in your mouth - not in your hand." [M&M's]
 - "You deserve a break today." [McDonald's]
 - "If it feels good then just do it." [Nike Shoes]
- What is your branding?
- If you don't have a brand identity, put serious thought into it—good or bad, it will stay with you for a long, long time.

2) Geographic/regional marketing

- Efforts that reach to a geographic area:—part of a state, an entire state, several states,
 - An area based on a historical, agricultural or other relationship
 - A state or state-based region
 - A distance-based area (a radius of x miles)
- This type of marketing works well for businesses that draw well from the following types of clientele:
 - Day- or weekend trippers
 - Family outings
 - Low-cost vacations
 - Frequent get-aways
 - Spontaneous travelers
 - Busy people unable to get away for extended periods
 - Those seeking products or services that are short-lived (i.e., meteor watching)

3) FAM trips

- FAM is short for “familiarization” trip, where a writer is provided complimentary product and/or services—agreed upon in advance, in order to write a magazine article.
- In order to work, you must be able to offer something newsworthy to a magazine’s readers, such as:
 - A new opportunity/a different experience
 - Something they want to see but can’t find elsewhere
 - Information of interest that they didn’t have before
- There are several ways to arrange FAM trips. The two most common are:
 - Contact a reputable writers’ organization such as the Outdoor Writers of America to offer the opportunity to a writer who publishes in magazines that cover your product and/or service.
 - Contact a magazine with a viable story opportunity, and invite the magazine to send someone to your business.

- *Note: You have to do your homework for this to work—either be a regular reader of the magazine or go to a library and do the research. Your credibility is on the line when you make the contact—if your idea has appeared in the last 18-24 months, it will be obvious to the editor that you’re more interested in publicity that serving the magazine’s readers.*

4) Partnerships

- Work with others in your industry to make your dollars go farther. Good examples include:
 - The Bed & Breakfast Association Directory
 - Get together with attractions in your area to create packages that will encourage visitors to stay longer, spend more
 - When done well, “value-added experiences” benefit all involved

5) Buzz marketing

- A new way of saying “word-of-mouth”.
- By providing positive vacation/daytrip experiences, you encourage your clients to talk about their experiences—to spread the buzz.
- The more your clients spread the buzz about how much fun they had at your place, the more their friends, neighbors and co-workers are likely to come visit you, too.

Tactics

- Business cards
 - Keep it clean and attractive—no clutter
 - Make the type large enough to read—at least 10 pt.
 - Include more than just your name, address, phone number, web site and email address
 - What do you offer? Hit the high points
 - Go ahead—use both sides!

- Brochures
 - Not the absolute essential they once were
 - Still good to have on hand—certain markets still expect/need them (those that don't use the web)
 - Nothing can make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. Make sure that the photos, copywriting and layout are clean and clear. If you don't start with quality, the best production in the world can't save it.
 - Cost-effective production alternatives are available—a QUALITY laser printer or quick printer on QUALITY paper will produce a very attractive product comparable to what formerly could only be achieved through the traditional print process.
 - Laser printing makes small quantities—a few hundred at a time—especially affordable; no need to print large quantities for economy.
- Map ads
 - Local map ads are worth considering.
 - Usually low-cost
 - Good for venues that lend themselves to spontaneity.
 - Not for everyone
- Rack cards
 - Vertical cards stocked in rest area visitor centers, motel lobbies, etc.
 - Well-produced cards are expensive.
 - Large quantities are needed in order to maintain stock through the tourist season.
- Web sites
 - Gen X and Gen Y are web savvy
 - Boomers are relying more and more on the Internet
 - Strongly recommend having at least a basic web site
 - Preferably, include a second level of pages for each basic area that you offer.
 - URLs & search terms—the second level of pages should be named using the service on the page in the

URL (example: www.byebyebirding.com/birding or www.byebyebirding.com/geocaching). This increases recognition by search engines. (Your web site consultant can help you with this.)

- Photos—keep photos small so pages will load quickly, but add links so that viewers can opt to open larger versions of the photos on separate pages.
- Links—set links to open in a new page, so that viewers aren't taken off of your page and led away. Once they close the new pages, your page is still open on their screens.
- Notes to remembers about web sites:
 - Info buttons other than your services will depend on your business, and are best determined by surfing other sites—not just in your industry—to see what is out there and what works. Ask people of varying ages and internet abilities for their opinions.
 - Work with a reliable web consultant. Consultants' names are listed at the bottoms of the pages of the sites. Before you sign on with a web consultant, do the same research you would do if the person/firm were replacing your roof or removing your appendix—ask people who have worked with the consultant:
 - How was the consultant to work with?
 - Was the consultant responsive to the client's requests?
 - Where the costs as represented?
 - How quickly updates are made?
 - You know which questions are important to you—ask them!

Closing

Last, but definitely not least, there's one more resource I highly recommend: NETWORKING. There is a wealth of knowledge in this room. I encourage you to take advantage of it.

Annette Tait, APR, has 20 years' experience as a communication professional. Her career in the travel and recreation industry included public relations management efforts in the U.S., Canada and Mexico. She is a member of the board of directors for the International Association of Business Communicators Pacific Plains Region, a member of the Public Relations Society of America, and is accredited in public relations by the Universal Accreditation Board.

Contact information:

Annette Tait, APR
North Dakota Department of Transportation
608 East Boulevard Avenue
Bismarck, ND 58505-0700
(701) 328-2194
Cell: (701) 527-3984
Email: atait@nd.gov